

MMS Alaska OCS Region

Focus Sheet

BEAUFORT SEA MULTI-SALE PROCESS

How will this work?

The MMS is preparing a new 5-year program to succeed the current one that ends June 30, 2002. In December 2000 MMS issued a request for comments and information, as the first step in a lengthy planning process.

The initial proposal, entitled Draft Proposed Outer Continental Shelf Oil & Gas Leasing Program 2002-2007, was published on July 23, 2001. The draft proposed program included three options for leasing in the Beaufort Sea during the 5-year period July of 2002 through June 2007: one sale, three sales, or five sales. The Secretary's preliminary decision for three sales provides for the first sale to be held in 2003, with subsequent sales in 2005 and 2007. The sale process for this first sale will require a minimum of two years to complete. In order to meet the requirements of that schedule, we are proceeding with the pre-sale process. A Call for Information and Nominations and Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (Call/NOI) was published on September 19, 2001. Comments are due by November 5, 2001. The Call/NOI reflects the Secretary's preliminary decision to analyze three sales in a multi-sale environmental impact statement (EIS). An environmental assessment or supplemental EIS will be prepared for the two subsequent sales.

The preparation of a multi-sale EIS is a new approach for the MMS Alaska OCS Region, although it has been in use in the Gulf of Mexico Region since 1997. MMS believes the multi-sale EIS will result in a more responsive and efficient application of the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Federal offshore leasing in the Beaufort Sea began in 1979. Seven lease sales have been held and EIS's have been prepared for each of those sales.

The NEPA regulations require agencies to implement procedures to reduce paperwork and the accumulation of extraneous background data by using program, policy, or plan EIS's and tiering from those "to eliminate repetitive discussion of the same issues." All foreseeable activity in the Beaufort Sea will likely be relatively nearshore, use common technology, occur in common timeframes during any particular year, have similar mitigating measures, be of similar scale, and share the same issues. The multi-sale EIS process will focus the environmental analysis by making impact types and levels that change between sales more easily recognizable. Any new issues will be more easily highlighted for decisionmakers and the public in subsequent environmental assessments or supplemental EIS's. The environmental documents prepared for subsequent sales, whether an environmental assessment or supplemental EIS, will provide for public review and comment.

Information considered in the decision to prepare either an environmental assessment or a supplemental EIS will include

- New issues that were not covered in the original multi-sale EIS
- Recently issued studies results and Information Transfer Meeting results for significant new information
- Federal, State, local government, tribal, and public responses to leasing documents from the last sale for significant requests for alternatives or mitigating measures not addressed in the original multi-sale EIS.

If the review finds no significant change, MMS will proceed with preparation of an environmental assessment. If there are new issues or significant new information or circumstances, MMS will prepare a supplemental EIS.

All three sales will be preceded by a proposed notice of sale, with opportunity for public comment, a consistency determination as required by the Coastal Zone Management Act implementing regulations, and a final Notice of Sale.

This approach provides the public and our various constituencies with all of the same opportunities for input into the decision process as those provided under the single-sale EIS approach. The benefit of the multi-sale approach is that it will significantly enhance the process by focusing attention on new information, issues, and circumstances for each of the subsequent sales and will eliminate the need for re-examining issues when no new information, issues, or circumstances exist.

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For More Information

**Minerals Management Service
Alaska OCS Region
949 E. 36th Avenue, Room 308
Anchorage, Alaska 99508-4363
Public Affairs Officer
(907) 271-6070
Public Information
(907) 271-6621
FAX (907) 271-6805
akwebmaster@mms.gov
www.mms.gov/alaska**